

HOWARD UNIVERSITY  
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SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY

January 30, 1947

Morris Fishbein, M. D.  
Editor, The Journal of the American Medical Association  
535 N. Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dr. Fishbein:

You know and I know that it is utterly impossible for a Negro physician to become a member of a county medical society in the South. The American Medical Association has stood behind the bylaws which make this so as though God himself had written the bylaws and that they were immutable through the ages. These bylaws can and, I think, should be changed.

As I pointed out in my previous letter, the basic laws of the American College of Surgeons, the International College of Surgeons, and all of the specialty boards have been changed to allow the admission of qualified Negro physicians without reference to the place in which they practice.

I believe it would be a very simple thing, even with our segregated set-up, for the Board of Trustees of the American Medical Association to initiate changes which would grant membership to qualified men in the American Medical Association without going through county societies. Your letter is a most unrealistic document. The American Medical Association is made up of many men who honestly believe that they are members of a truly representative group of American physicians. They, I believe, would be surprised to know that a large segment of the physicians of this country who need, perhaps more than any other segment, the continuing contacts, the continuous postgraduate development, the continuous stimulation of attendance at meetings where the learned men of the country discuss common problems, are denied such privileges on the basis of race alone.

I know that in the past it has been suggested to the American Medical Association that in those territories where Negroes are not eligible for membership in the county societies that their ethical and moral qualities be vouched for by the various state Negro societies. I have had the pleasure of taking part in the annual meetings of such societies in Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

They are all well organized. Several of these groups have had annual meetings in which as high as 94% of their total membership has taken part. They are a real and vital part of American medicine and should no longer have to explain on every application blank why they are not eligible for membership in the A. M. A. It is an unwarranted stigma. It is a cause of repeated humiliation. It is a constant indictment of the principles on which the American Medical Association is supposedly founded.

You know the answer, and I know the answer. I cannot understand why something is not done about it. If there are suggestions which you can make out of your greater intimacy with the problem I should appreciate hearing about them. We would be able, I am sure, to rally the Negro physicians of the country around any program which would promise emancipation. I think you could help this situation. I wish very sincerely that you would decide to do so.

Very sincerely yours,

Charles R. Drew, M. D.  
Professor of Surgery

GRD:gw